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PREPARING STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

A PARENT RESOURCE: NEW TESTS. NEW RESULTS.

We owe it to our kids to make sure that they receive an education that prepares them to thrive in a global economy and civic life. That's why Connecticut raised the bar and issued a new instructional roadmap that will prepare our kids for college and careers.

Our new roadmap, the Connecticut Core Standards, sets learning expectations for what students should learn and be able to do at each grade level so that by the time they graduate from high school, they are ready to succeed in college and the workplace. Local teachers and educators still select and develop curriculum documents and lesson plans.

With these new learning expectations, Connecticut needs new ways to measure student progress. The assessments are like academic checkups. They help teachers and parents see how on-track students are to where they need to be. This year, the Smarter Balanced assessments will replace our old state tests, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), in English language arts and math.

Real-world skills

The Connecticut Core Standards focus on critical thinking and problem-solving—the skills students need to be successful in college and careers. The Smarter Balanced assessments will be administered on computers and are designed to measure these skills through reading comprehension, writing, and math questions that require students to demonstrate that they truly understand the content—not just fill in a bubble.

Smarter Balanced will help parents and teachers better understand how the student is performing at that moment in time during the school year. The results of the test can reveal subjects where the student is excelling and where the student needs extra help.



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Our schools are prepared

The good news is that 90% of Connecticut schools already have one successful administration of the Smarter Balanced test completed. Given the option, most schools and districts chose to administer the test last year. It helped familiarize students and staff with taking the tests on the computer. The feedback was generally positive and most schools' technology proved ready.

This is certainly a big shift for Connecticut's students and teachers—but one that holds great promise for our students. **By making this transition, we are better preparing our kids to meet the demands of college and the 21st century workforce.**

New ruler for measuring student success

With the new tests, students will receive new scores. **Results will be different.** In many cases, the scores will look lower on the Smarter Balanced tests than what many are used to seeing on the CMT/CAPT exams. This means that, in the beginning, fewer students may score at higher levels. This does not mean that students are learning less. Rather, it reflects that we set the bar higher. This is to be expected because **we are using a different ruler.** The shift is like going from centimeters on the CMT/CAPT to inches on the new exams. If the finish line was set at marker “4,” much more distance needs to be covered to reach 4 inches than it does to reach 4 centimeters. Reaching a “4” along the CMT/CAPT measuring stick is not the same as reaching a “4” along the Smarter Balanced measuring stick.

In effect, comparing scores on CMT/CAPT to Smarter Balanced is like comparing apples to oranges. Given that the ruler is changing, and that the exams are testing different content and skills, we won't be able to compare scores.

States that made the transition to college- and career-ready standards early did see a drop in scores, but they are also seeing improvements year-to-year. For example, in Kentucky the percentage of high school graduates ready for college and careers has increased from 38% to 62% in just four years. **The initial shift in Connecticut's scores might be jarring.** Based on the experiences of these states, we can also reasonably expect that the first results from the new tests will resemble Connecticut's scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

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But like the early adoption states, we anticipate that **scores will steadily improve in the coming years** as students and teachers gain more classroom experience with the standards.

What parents can do

Our teachers and students are aiming higher. The world is an increasingly demanding place and education must evolve to keep pace. Teaching and learning in today's classroom looks different from what many parents experienced.

There are many things parents and guardians can do to be prepared to help students through the transition:

- Speak with your child's teachers about what might be different and what you can do to help your child with the new material at home.
- Ask your child's principal if the school plans to hold an orientation to learn about the new standards and tests to better understand the changes your child is experiencing in the classroom.
- Check with your school's parent organization to see if they are holding an information session on what parents can do to help students at home.
- The State Department of Education is providing parents with resources for each grade level to be able to help children with the standards at home. Visit CTcorestandards.org for more helpful information about the changes. Content continues to be added specifically for parents.

Change is difficult. In the beginning, it might seem that students have a long way to go to reach the new expectations. But Connecticut teachers and administrators are committed to working together to support students with great instruction and resources to meet these new expectations.

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